

African anti-terrorism push misguided

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

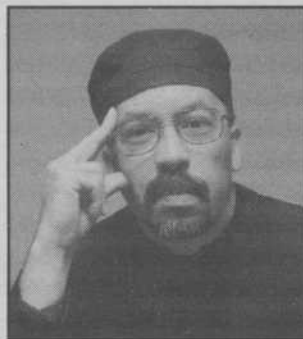
Across the front pages of several of this nation's newspapers came the recent announcement that the Bush administration had embarked on another adventure in its so-called war against terrorism. Referred to as the Trans Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative, this effort involves an annual budget of \$100 million as well as the deployment of troops and advisers to help prosecute the fight against terrorism in Africa. There is only one problem: the sort of terrorism described by the Bush administration — not a major problem in Africa. In fact, to push the envelope a bit further, one could say that it is not even a minor problem. When compared on scale with the major problems affecting the continent, it simply does not rate. Consider:

- Since 1997, approximately 4 million people have died as a result of the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

peace agreement — resulted in the deaths of 2 million people. The current Darfur crisis in the western Sudan has resulted in the deaths of approximately 400,000 people.

- The HIV/AIDS pandemic has hit Africa like no other continent. In 2005 alone, 2.4 million people have died as a result of the illness. Only 10 percent of those infected with HIV in Africa are able to get regular access to anti-retrovirals.

- Poverty has been increasing over the years rather than decreasing. Africa has made insufficient advances in economic development, the building or rebuilding of infrastructure, and most of its nations are burdened by debt imposed by the international financial institutions and/or the nations of the global North.



BILL FLETCHER, JR.

the continent. Al Qaeda-like terrorism does not hold a candle to these tragedies.

More than anything else, the Trans Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative reflects both the desire to secure major African oil reserves as well as the mindset of an administration that has determined that its particular notion of the terrorism danger must be the great-

est catastrophe to affect planet Earth since a meteor struck this planet 65 million years ago and wiped out the dinosaurs. Rather than recognizing the principal problems affecting the majority of the world's peoples generally, and African peoples in particular, such as poverty, civil wars, wealth polarization, corporate rape, out-of-control epidemics while governments are forced to divert resources to paying off debt, etc., the Bush administration has decided that counter-terrorism must be, in all situations, the modus operandi for all nations.

Thus, at a moment when Africa needs des-

perately to demilitarize, the Bush administration promotes policies of militarization. At a moment when Africa desperately needs to further democratization, the Bush administration promotes policies that encourage despotic governments to cry "terrorism" every time that they wish to suppress opposition (whether that opposition is armed or unarmed).

Lacking any real historical analysis, and certainly lacking any sense of the destructive roles that the United States and Western Europe have played in Africa for hundreds of years, the Bush administration adds kerosene to an already inflamed situation. What is so desperately needed is a U.S. contribution of assistance to peace-making and peace-keeping operations in Africa as well as constructive economic assistance to African nations as they position themselves to be successful actors in the 21st century.

Perhaps this is too much of a New Year's wish.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is president of TransAfrica Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit educational and organizing center.

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raised concerns about the president's actions, those lawmakers have been briefed on the problem: the sort of terrorism described by the Bush administration in Africa. In fact, to push the envelope a bit further, one could say that it is not even a minor problem. When compared on scale with the major problems affecting the continent, it simply does not rate. Consider:

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"We're a nation of laws. ...That means that everybody has to live by the law, including the administration," said Ahr, 64, a Democrat who argues for checks and balances. "For the administration to simply go after wiretaps on their own without anyone else's say-so is a violation of that principle."

The eavesdropping is run by the secretive National Security Agency, the government's code-makers and code-breakers.

Charles Franklin, a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said most people think that the eavesdropping is aimed at foreign terrorists, even when the surveillance is conducted inside the country.

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of Maine and Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, have called for immediate inquiries.

On top of that, a memorandum circulated Friday from two legal analysts at the Congressional Research Service concluded that the justification for the monitoring may not be as strong as the administration has argued.

The NSA's activity "may present an exercise of presidential power at its lowest

ebb," the 44-page memo said.

Bush based his eavesdropping orders on his presidential powers under the Constitution and a September 2001 congressional resolution authorizing him to use military force in the fight against terrorism.

The administration says the program is reviewed every 45 days and that Bush personally reauthorizes it.

His top legal advisers argue its justification is sound.

The issue is full of grays for some people interviewed for the poll, including homebuilder Harlon Bennett, 21, a political independent from Wellston, Okla. He does not think the government should need warrants for suspected terrorists.

"Of course," he added, "we all could be suspected terrorists."

Center

(Continued from Page 4)

1960s civil rights movement. "While the National Park Service will take care of maintenance costs and the property, the board and the family will continue to control the center's programs and missions."

Young, now 73 and chairman of Goodworks International, said the deal is comparable to the government maintaining Atlanta's Carter Center and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston.

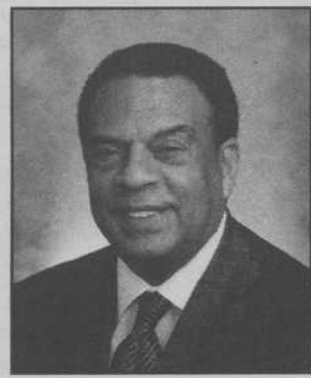
In a December press statement announcing the new official for The King Center, Farris said that the board authorized the exploration of options surrounding the transfer of property of The King Center, including Dr. King's birth home. The transfer would relieve the center of the economic burdens...

and enable the Center to focus on enhanced program(s) development."

National Park Service or Department of Interior officials were not immediately

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— Andrew Young
King Center Director



available for comment. The agreement reportedly will have the center's property deeded to the U.S. government; however, the terms allow the King family to maintain control of the center's initiatives. Farris was unreachable at late press time to expound on "exploration of options."

King III said in a news release, "The election of Isaac Newton Farris as president and chief executive officer will strengthen our capacity to act more effectively. Isaac brings an insightful understanding of my father's teachings, combined with

knowledge of The King Center's history and a vision for its unique potential. We expect significant progress in the Center's development under his leadership."

Farris had said earlier, "I'm grateful for the confidence our chairman and board have placed in me. I look forward to working with the center's staff in making the 2006 observance of my uncle's birthday a great success, and a wonderful celebration of the 20th anniversary of the federal holiday in his honor."

Young was an executive director of the SCLC during

King's reign as founding president. The SCLC was founded by King, Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, Rev. Joseph E. Lowery and other clergy in 1957.

King III remains an active member of the center's board and has elected to reduce his workload to devote more time and energy to assist in the rehabilitation of founder, Coretta Scott King, according to center officials.

She is recuperating after a stroke that left her temporarily incapacitated last August and continues to progress with daily physical therapy.

Two months ago, the 78-year-old mother of four attended a local birthday celebration for eldest daughter, Yolanda, now 50.

Dr. King, a native of Atlanta was born on Jan. 15 and would have been 76 years old. King's national birthday celebration was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1986.

David Stokes writes for the Atlanta Inquirer.